

FIVE

FIVE HISTORIC CEMETERIES.
FIVE TEAM PARTNERS.
FIVE COMMUNITY MEETINGS.
HUNDREDS OF STAKEHOLDERS.
ONE MASTER PLAN.

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN CEMETERY MASTER PLAN

Issue #4, August 2014



Next Meeting

Monday, November 3, 2014
6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
Zilker Botanical Gardens
2220 Barton Springs Road



Speak Up, Austin!

Two community surveys are now online and ready for your input! The Cemetery Master Plan team is seeking your opinions on two topics.

The first survey (online at <http://speakupaustin.org/surveys/potential-programming-in-city-cemeteries>) seeks to learn why and how often people currently visit the cemeteries. Having more people in the older cemeteries, especially, can deter crime and vandalism, as well as build awareness and support for their care.

Survey #2 (online at <http://speakupaustin.org/surveys/burial-options>) is about burial options. As cremation and natural/green burial become more popular, the City might consider creating spaces in one or more cemeteries for different interment alternatives.





Programming and Policies

November 3 meeting to focus on actively engaging the community in the cemeteries and their upkeep

Throughout the development of the Master Plan, the consultant team has spoken with members of the community about ways the City of Austin can encourage citizens to become more aware of the city cemeteries and to actively support programming that brings people into the cemeteries, especially the older cemeteries (Oakwood, Plummers, and Oakwood Annex) where only a few people are buried each year.

The November 3 meeting will include information about:

- ✿ Best Practices from around the United States, including what the Master Plan team has learned from other cemeteries with a proven track record of success.
- ✿ Partnership opportunities with other City departments, non-profit organizations, and schools and universities.

✿ Revenue and funding sources that can supplement City budgets.

Many people have strong feelings about these topics. The Master Plan team is working diligently to find a balance between many competing (and sometimes conflicting) priorities and needs.

To make your feelings heard, call the Austin 3-1-1 line or send an email to Kim McKnight at kim.mcknight@austintexas.gov.

Rules and Regulations

In October 2013, City Council directed the Cemetery Manager to conduct a public engagement process to evaluate cemetery rules, particularly those related to grave ornamentation, and to develop a policy that would be sensitive to personal and cultural expressions of grief while enabling appropriate maintenance activities and compliance with health and safety laws.

Consulting firm Smith|Associates led a series of four meetings with members of the community, conducted stakeholder interviews, and solicited input through Speak Up Austin. In total, they collected more than 2,900 unique comments from 282 individuals. Based on that information, the firm drafted a set of proposed revised rules. That information has now been



provided to the Cemetery Master Plan team, which will use it as a basis for making recommendations as part of the Master Plan. Look for more information about this at the November 3 Master Plan meeting!

Resetting Grave Markers

One of the most common tasks in cemetery preservation and conservation is the resetting of grave markers that have shifted or fallen. Here's what it takes to perform this task safely and appropriately.



Resetting grave markers is one of the most common preservation tasks in a cemetery. A variety of factors can cause grave markers to tilt or fall over.

In Austin, most of the cemeteries are located on land where the soil has a high clay content. (The soil at Evergreen Cemetery is a bit more sandy.) This causes shifting of markers over time, as the ground contracts and expands based on the amount of moisture in it. Drought conditions have exacerbated this problem.

Other factors that impact grave markers include trees planted too close to the marker, which displace the marker over time as they grow; vandalism; impact from vehicles, especially near roadways; and subsidence of the soil over or near gravesites.

Not all tilted grave markers should be reset, since the act of resetting can cause the marker to be damaged. In general, only the

most severely tilted markers (or those that have fallen over entirely) should be reset.

Grave markers that are made of stone generally weigh between 150–180 pounds per cubic foot. A simple granite marker that measures 24" by 12" by 8" (1.5 cubic feet) could weigh as much as 270 pounds. Many markers are much larger and heavier, so safety is an important concern.

The task of resetting may require a new foundation or the leveling of an existing foundation. Lifting a marker requires the use of a hoist and straps (never chains or cables) rated for the weight of the stone to be reset.

Cleaning, stabilization, or other repairs may be required at the same time. Both resetting and this additional work should be performed or overseen by a conservation professional. Staff or volunteers can provide valuable assistance, but training is

essential for the safety of both people and markers.

Due to the number of markers in Austin's city cemeteries that are tilted or fallen, the Cemetery Master Plan will include the team's recommendations for prioritizing markers for resetting,



as well as guidance for how the City might undertake an ongoing program.

It is important to realize, however, that no matter what the City does, some grave markers will always be tilted. That is just the nature of a cemetery – the ground moves, and so do the grave markers.

Preparing for Emergencies

One of the topics to be covered in the Cemetery Master Plan is emergency/disaster preparedness. Luckily, the Cemetery Conservation staff at the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training have created guidance on this topic. (More at www.ncptt.nps.org.)

1. Document current conditions of all cemetery resources: grave markers, monuments, trees, and cemetery buildings, structures, and infrastructure.

Knowing what is where, and what condition things are in, provides a baseline against which damage can be measured. The City of Austin is already well positioned with photographic and historic records of all five historic cemeteries, thanks to ongoing work by City staff, the Texas

2. Address problems and mitigate risks in advance.

A thorough assessment of current conditions also can help to identify risky conditions, so that the City can deal with those before they become major problems, or at least monitor issues until they can be addressed.

3. Secure cemetery records (hard copies and digital).

Burial records, deeds, maps, etc. should be protected from fire, water, and windstorms. This can include storage in waterproof, fire-safe filing cabinets as well as the backup and remote storage of digital files.



Downed tree, photo by David Fine/FEMA

4. Train staff for disaster/emergency response.

Everyone needs to be prepared before a problem or event occurs. This includes not only determining what tasks must be completed, but also what tools, supplies, and equipment will be needed. Staff should know how to take emergency action in the event that an individual needs to turn off gas, electrical power, or water mains.

5. Get to know the experts.

Help is available from professional associations, disaster response companies, and other groups that specialize in dealing with disasters and emergency situations. The City can proactively make those contacts and even sign up for help before help is ever needed.

Contact Information for City Officials

Mayor and City Council

Austin City Hall
301 W. Second St. Second Floor
Austin, TX 78701

Mayor Lee Leffingwell

City Council Members:

Sheryl Cole, mayor pro tem

Mike Martinez

Laura Morrison

Chris Riley

Bill Spelman

Kathie Tovo

Office of the City Manager

P. O. Box 1088, Austin, TX 78767
512-974-2200

City Manager Marc Ott

Deputy City Manager
Michael McDonald

Assistant City Managers:

Rey Arellano

Robert Goode

Sue Edwards

Bert Lumberras

Anthony Snipes

Parks and Recreation Department

P. O. Box 1088, Austin, TX 78767
512-974-9467

Director Sara Hensley

Assistant Directors:
Kimberly McNeeley
Charlie Romines
Cora Wright

Project Coordinator
Kim McKnight

Cemetery Manager
Gilbert Hernandez



Our Mission

The purpose of the Parks and Recreation Department is to provide, protect, and preserve a park system that promotes quality recreational, cultural, and outdoor experiences for the Austin community.



The City of Austin is proud to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

If you require assistance for participation in our programs or use of our facilities, please call (512) 974-9478.



We Want You! to Participate in the Master Plan Process

In order for this project to be successful, it needs to be inclusive and representative of the Austin community. You can help and make your voice heard. Here's how:

✿ Attend one or more community meetings. The meetings are being held in various locations around the city and on different days and times, so that as many people as possible can attend. The next one will take place on **Monday, November 3, 2014** from **6:00 – 8:00 p.m.** at the **Zilker Botanical Garden, 2220 Barton Springs Road, Austin, Texas.**

✿ Sign up to receive this newsletter via email, or look for it at your local library, community center, or senior center. Share it with your friends and neighbors.

✿ Sign up for the Austin Cemetery Master Plan email list to get up-to-the-minute information right in your inbox. To subscribe, send an email to Kim.McKnight@AustinTexas.gov.

✿ Participate in Speak Up Austin! Surveys. You can find them at <https://austintexas.granicusideas.com/surveys>.

✿ Visit the Austin Cemetery Master Plan website at <http://www.austintexas.gov/departments/cemetery-master-plan>.

✿ Share your input and feedback with Kim McKnight (PARD Project Coordinator):

- Email kim.mcknight@austintexas.gov
- Call 512-974-9478
- Send a letter to PARD, Attn: Kim McKnight, P.O. Box 1088, Austin, Texas 78767-1088

✿ Call the Austin 3-1-1 line and share your opinions.





The City of Austin Cemetery Master Plan

Next community meeting:

November 3, 2014

6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Zilker Botanical Garden

2220 Barton Springs Road

Learn more at www.cityofaustin.org/parks

City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department

P.O. Box 1088, Austin, Texas 78767-1088